

German Research: Family Books in Württemberg

Germany “How to” Guide, Intermediate Level: Instruction

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OBJECTIVE

This guide will teach you:

- About the creation of Württemberg family books (collections of family group sheets).
- What information is contained in family book records.
- How to locate a specific family book record in your parish of interest.

INTRODUCTION

Family books are a genealogical source specific to parishes (**Protestant and Catholic**) in Württemberg (now part of the German state of Baden-Württemberg). This record type exists in other areas of modern-day Germany as well, but the family books in other regions are generally less detailed and less consistent than those kept in Württemberg.

Family books are an overarching concept. The books themselves may be called by various names. The following list of German terms for these records may be helpful:

1. *Seelenbeschreibung, Familienbeschreibung, status animarum*, “description of souls” (Catholic parish family books; began in 1614 due to a *Rituale Romanum* by Pope Paul V; forerunner of the *Familienbuch*)
2. *Familienbuch, Familienbücher*, “family book(s)” (paragraph descriptions; began in the 1600s; forerunner of the *Seelenregister*)
3. *Seelenregister*, “register(s) of souls” (Protestant church membership lists; began in the mid-1700s; forerunner of the *Familienregister*)
4. *Familienregister*, “family register(s)” (preprinted forms; began in 1808)

The various terms overlap, e.g., *Familienbuch* may refer either to family books that began in the 1600s or to those that began in the mid-1900s. As such, take care to look at all collections in your parish of interest containing any of the key terms above.

In this “How to” Guide, the term “**family book**” will generally mean the collection of preprinted forms that began in 1808, and “**family book record**” will refer to the individual forms.

King Friedrich I of Württemberg issued a proclamation on 15 November 1807 that called for the creation of *Familienregister*, “family registers,” a more uniform form of the *Seelenregister* (which began in the mid-1700s), from 1 January 1808 and on. At that same time, he ordered that all

parishes in Württemberg, whether Catholic or Protestant, were to follow certain set formats for recordkeeping; the family books, likewise on set forms, were thus expected to be kept by Protestant and Catholic parishes in all of Württemberg.

From the very beginning, family books were kept only in German. At the time a couple married, a family record was created on a single piece of paper, a printed form (divided into columns) that was later bound into a book with other family records. In 1876, the family book records were given over to the civil registry offices and kept in Stuttgart. This type of family book was replaced with its modern equivalent on 1 January 1958, which continued until German family book records were discontinued in 2007.

Although these family books were kept beginning in the year 1808, information contained therein can include names of people from a generation earlier. At the time of its creation, the record would only list information about the husband and wife and the names of their parents; each subsequent change in the immediate family was then added to the record. If a wife died and the husband remarried, his new wife would be listed on the same family book record; however, usually if a husband died and the wife remarried, she would then be listed on her new husband's family book record. All children born to the family are listed as well, including any stillborn children. (Note that "stillborn" in many countries includes children who only lived a short time after birth.) Sometimes illegitimate grandchildren of a couple are also listed. Family book records are thus invaluable, three- or four-generation documents.

Family book records began to be referenced (by volume and page number) in baptism, marriage, and burial records, yet birth and death dates—not baptism and burial dates—were recorded in the family books. This is because even though parish priests were the ones given the task of filling out the family book records, it was a civil rather than a church task. Thus, the family books were not meant to focus on ecclesiastical events.

To locate a family book record, you will need to know the **parish** (or town, from which you can locate the parish by using www.Meyersgaz.org) your ancestors lived in. An **approximate marriage date** may be helpful, though not always necessary, as most family books include a name index or are listed in alphabetical order of the husband's surname.

You may want to examine the following "How to" Guides before continuing:

- Consult Meyer's Gazetteer Online: Meyersgaz.org to learn how to locate the parish of your town of interest
- Consult the [German Script Tutorial](#) to learn about and practice reading the old German script

HOW TO

The easiest method of locating a family book record of your specific parish is to look for the parish in the FamilySearch catalog. Alternatively, the FamilySearch catalog can be searched for one of the keywords listed above to pull up a long list of family books.

Steps

- In the FamilySearch catalog, type in the name of your **parish** of interest and select the correct location from the dropdown box.
- Select the **Church records** heading and choose the church book that covers the year in which your person of interest married (if the marriage date is unknown, estimate based on other known or estimated event dates).
- In the Film/Digital Notes section at the bottom of the page, look for one of the words indicating a family book.
 - If there are several entries, it may be difficult to locate all the family books. On the computer keyboard, hit the Ctrl key and hold it as you press the letter F; a search box will show up in the top right-hand corner of your screen. Start typing in one of the key words; matches on the page will be highlighted.
 - If no family books are listed, return to the previous page and select a different church book for the same parish. If no family book is listed in any of the church books, there may not be any available for this parish.
- Open the family book collection by clicking on the **camera icon**, if one is available and accessible, or by looking up the microfilm in the Family History Library.
- If viewing the images digitally, employ the back-and-forth arrows, the zoom feature, and the number-search box to locate the beginning of the family book. To identify the beginning of a new record type or a new volume within the film (especially if other record types are listed in the Film/Digital Notes as being in the same collection), look for images containing one of the following:
 - A book cover.
 - The words "*Band 1*" (or "*Band 2*," etc.; "*Band*" meaning volume) in white on a black background.
 - Just the word "begin" (on a white background).
 - Other markers include bookend images containing microfilm information, the parish name, the record type, and the date range of the records (see Figure 1).

LOCALITY OF RECORD:	TITLE OF RECORD:
VADUZ	
ZIVILSTANDSAMT	FAMILIEN BUCH
MICROFILMED BY THE GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY OF SALT LAKE CITY.	VOLUME NO: II
FILMED AT: VADUZ FL	YEARS: 1806-1963
DATE: 25 APRIL 1978	
PHOTOGRAPHER: IRENE DOERING	
CAMERA NO: 3147 RED: 16 EXP: 64-3	

Figure 1. Katholische Kirche Vaduz (Liechtenstein), "Familienbücher, 1789-1971," FamilySearch (accessed 29 April 2019), FHL microfilm 1186690, Item 7, image 950.

- If no such markers exist, spot-check images and compare them with the collection as listed in the Film/Digital Notes section of the previous screen to determine where in the collection you are and whether you need to move further forward or further back through the images to locate the family book.
- Look for all of the above to locate the beginning of the family book.
- Once you have located the family book, look for an index.
 - Family books often contain an in-book index, usually found at the beginning or end of the book. (Note that this is not necessarily the same as the beginning or end of the microfilm, if other record types are on the same microfilm.)
 - Some family books are made more accessible by the existence of a separate family book index, which will be listed in the Film/Digital Notes as some variant of *Familienbuchindex* or *Familienbuch mit Index*. Such an index is more unusual.
 - The name index, if one exists, is sometimes preceded by a town index. In this case, you would look for the correct town and then identify the person within.
 - The name index is of the husbands' names. The surnames are often listed pseudo-alphabetically, meaning all surnames with the same initial letter will be listed together, with no additional letters taken into account. (For example, Stein may precede Schröder, but they will be listed together since they both begin with the letter S.)

- Family book records are generally listed in alphabetical order by surname of the housefather. (Later family book records may be listed chronologically.) Flip through the images until you reach the surname you are searching for, and then look at the first names to locate the correct family book record (multiple families in the family book may have the same surname).
 - When browsing the family book to locate the correct record, do not mistake the occupation (generally listed immediately after the name) for the surname.
 - Sometimes family book records are not listed in alphabetical order. If you cannot find the record you are looking for where you expect it to be alphabetically, look through the other images since it may still be somewhere in the book.
- Take note of all names, dates, places, and relationships listed in the family record. Note that if a man was married multiple times, all of his marriages will be listed in the same family book record. Each wife is usually noted with a Roman numeral, and the children that belong to that couple will be noted with the same Roman numeral.
 - If a child is listed as being illegitimate, look for either a note about the child's parentage or a symbol that acts as an asterisk.
 - This "illegitimacy" symbol differs but is oftentimes an X (note that the cross † and the X sometimes look similar, but the cross is reserved to mean death). The asterisk will be marked in front of the illegitimate child's name as well as in front of the parent's name.
 - It is important to note the location of the asterisk, as illegitimate children in a family book record may be the offspring of the housefather, of the housemother, of the couple (people often had a child or two before marrying each other), or even of one of the couple's own children. In the case of an illegitimate child of the couple's child being listed, the family book record acts as a partly four-generational record.
- Refer to the original baptism, marriage, or burial records in the parish to verify the names and dates (and clear up any confusion about information) contained in the family book.
 - Family books are usually very trustworthy, as the parish priest generally was the one to enter the information, referring to the originals; however, errors can always creep in, so original records should also be consulted.

Information generally found in family book records

- Husband and wife: names, dates and places of birth, death dates, and marriage date and place; also husband's occupation
- Couple's parents: names (including maiden name of their mothers); also occupations of their fathers; if family book records already existed for the parents, the volume and page number of these records should be included here

- Couple's children, including those stillborn: names, dates (and sometimes places) of birth, date of confirmation or first communion, marriage dates (and sometimes names of spouses), and death dates

Further information

- Read [Gathering Information to Locate Place of Origin](#), a FamilySearch Wiki article, to help you determine which U.S. records to search to locate the German town of origin
- Watch [Online Class: Finding German Places of Origin](#), a webinar walk-through of the process, and read the webinar's [accompanying handout](#)

PRACTICE

Follow the steps below to familiarize yourself with how to locate a specific family book record:

1. Go to familysearch.org, click on or hover the mouse over the **Search** heading, and select **Catalog**. You do not need to log in at this point if you prefer not to.
2. In the **Place** search box, type in the parish your person of interest belonged to. As you type, a list of dropdown options will show up; select the correct locality and click **Search**. For practice purposes, type in **Laimnau** and select the option labeled **Germany, Württemberg, Laimnau**. Click **Search**.
3. Select the heading labeled **Church records**. For Laimnau, FamilySearch currently contains one church book, here called **Kirchenbuch, 1627-1900**. Click on the title; this will bring you to a new page, containing information about this specific book. On this page, notice that the church book is for the Catholic parish of Laimnau in the government district of Tettang and that the records are in German.
 - If FamilySearch has no church records for your parish of interest or does not have the years you need, contact the parish in Germany.
4. Scroll down to the Film/Digital Notes section of the page. Note that two titles contain the word *Familienregister*, one on microfilm number 1044275 and the other on microfilm number 1044276. As this is listed as an International Film, you will find this microfilm on floor B1 of the Family History Library.
 - If a microfilm is available at other family history centers, a dropdown **Location** box will appear directly above the Notes section. Click on this box and select one of the locations to only see collections available in that family history center.
5. In the far right-hand column, on the same line as the "Tote 1867-1900 Familienregister ab 1800" title, notice a small camera icon. This icon indicates that the microfilm has been digitized and that the images are available online at FamilySearch. Click on the **camera icon** to open the collection. At this point, you will need to log in to FamilySearch.
 - For some collections, even after logging in, there will be the image of a key over the camera icon, indicating that you cannot view the digital images. The digital images of some collections are only available to be viewed at the Family History

Library, at family history centers in general, or by those with an LDS log-in, depending on various written contracts pertaining to the use of the images.

- If you do not have access to the digital images, look up the microfilm and browse the images directly from the film.
6. Note that the “Tote 1867-1900 Familienregister ab 1800” collection contains two record types: deaths and family books. The family books are listed last in the title, so on the microfilm they will still be after the deaths. If viewing the images digitally, there are multiple ways to browse the images. Use the following options to locate the family book:
 - Look at the icons to the far left of the screen. If you hover the mouse over the icon of eight tiny squares, you will see the words “Browse multiple images” show up. Click on this **eight-square icon** to view several images (in small format) at the same time. Use the mouse to scroll until you locate a **front cover** or an image that just contains the word “**begin**” or another marker; this is the beginning of a new record type within the film. Double-click on the image to enlarge it.
 - Alternatively, change the image number in the left-hand corner, just above the images. To change the image number, select the current number located in the white box, type in a new image number, and hit Enter on the keyboard. This is a faster option, for example if there are multiple record types in a collection and you wish to quickly skip past many of the images.
 - To move back and forth between images at a slower pace (i.e., one image at a time), you can click on the **back arrow** and the **forward arrow** located just above the images. Double-click on an **image** to enlarge it.
 7. Using the methods above, you will find that there are three family books in this collection. Locate the front cover of the second book.
 8. Each of the three family books has its own index. Locate the index for the second book.
 - In the case of the Laimnau family book, the second book’s front cover is on image 343, and its index begins on image 345. The index is of the husbands, listed pseudo-alphabetically by surname (that is, all the surnames with the same initial letter are listed together). The page number on which each family book record is located is listed next to the husband’s name.
 9. Find the name **Martin Köberle** in the index, and note the **page number** by his name.
 - **Martin Köberle** is found in the index on image 356. Next to his name is listed the **page number, 37b**.
 10. Locate the family book record by referring to the page number found in the index. (Page 37b is found on image 410.) Once you have located the family book record, take note of all of the information listed in it, including names, dates, places, and relationships.

ACTIVITY

Now, test your skills you have learned in this “How to” Guide. The Activity is a way to check your knowledge and let you know you’ve mastered the Guide! [Click here to try out the Activity.](#)